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**INTRODUCTION:**  
*YOUTH AS A CATEGORY THROUGH WHICH CLASS IS LIVED*

*Take control of your life before we do!*

—Sheriff of Suffolk County (Billboard on the highway overlooking The Suffolk County House of Corrections, Boston, MA [2004])

This special issue from *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor* was conceptualized and assembled with the intent of addressing how class structures and struggles dramatically affect the diversity of youth around the globe as they face a history of, and increasing subjugation to, the economic, political, and cultural logic of capital. Corporations, in the name of globalization and neoliberalism, are running rampant around the planet in search of endless profits. Propagating the myth of free market principles as they go, it's only about 500 transnational corporations that actually control 80 percent of global investment and 70 percent of trade. In the guise of democracy and free trade, imperialist governments that preach deregulation and the natural flow of market principles are applying diplomatic and military pressure on other nations in order to secure unlimited access to cheap labor, raw materials, and new areas of investment. What is in fact regulation in favor of the transnational corporate giants—that needless to say despise and work to crush competition, is leading to the virtual elimination of national sovereignty in many countries. The sweep-of-the-hand mandates of such financial organizations as the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization reveal the grand contradiction between capitalism and democracy. Rather than encourage public participation, neoliberalism makes it that much easier for invading corporate interests to smash democratic grassroots movements, environmental protections, and social policies and institutions developed to help secure the public's well being.

1.2 Unfortunately, in the midst of theoretical battles over globalization and a politics of identity and difference, class as an analytic distinction has somehow been buried in the upheavals of endless shelling. In the United States this is not surprising given that the country's history, from colonialism on, has been built on the interests of the business classes that produce and benefit from the denial of the economic, political, and cultural realities of a class system. But such disavowal contradicts the myth of the American dream which implies a class structure as it romanticizes the movement from the bottom to the top of the economic ladder.

1.3 One needn't go far within the borders of the United States to be exposed to class divisions and conflicts. In what is now a post-industrial society—a society that relies on service industries, knowledge production, and information technology rather than industrial manufacturing to generate capital—the average wage is 29 percent less than it was during the days of industry. Within these economic shifts, the middle class is imploding into the working class, which in turn is imploding into the working poor who are literally relegated to life in the streets. Census data show that the gap between the rich and the poor in this country to be the widest since the government started collecting information in 1947. In fact, the U.S. has the most unequal distribution of wealth and income in the industrialized world. As Holly Sklar (2002) points out:

...33 million Americans are poor in this richest nation on earth. That's more than the combined population of the District of Columbia plus 21 states: Alaska, Arkansas, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia and Wyoming. (2)

Keep in mind the federal poverty thresholds: one person under 65 = \$9,214, two people under 65 with one child = \$12,207. "Twenty-nine percent of American families make less than what the Economic Policy Institute estimates is needed to meet basic needs—a national median of \$33,551" (Jackson, 2001: 4). 6.8 million families live in poverty. 43.6 million Americans lack health insurance. This is a particularly interesting statistic given that "the average compensation for the top health care executives at the top 10 managed healthcare companies, not including unexercised stock options, is \$11.7 million per year" (Jackson, 2001: 3). To generate the enormous profits to cover these salaries, insurance premiums are going up, patient coverage is being weakened, and, regardless of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the praise of free market principles, people in the U.S. are legally prohibited from buying less expensive prescription drugs from Canada.

1.4 The richest 1 percent of Americans controls about 40 percent of the nation's wealth; the top 5 percent has more than 60 percent (Collins, Hartman & Sklar, 1999). The nation's wealthiest 10 percent own almost 90 percent of all stocks and mutual funds (Collins, Hartman & Sklar, 1999). While one in two Americans don't own stocks, the ubiquitous numbers from Wall Street imply that the market will help those in need and the country as a whole.

1.5 Unemployment in the U.S. has hovered at about 6 percent since George W. Bush took office as the President, and approximately 3 million jobs have been lost during his tenure (United States Department of Labor, 2003). These job losses are not merely lay-offs caused by hard economic times; nor are they a direct result of 9/11 as conservatives would have us believe. With capital flight and global outsourcing, both blue collar and white collar jobs have been and continue to be exported by U.S. corporations to nations that pay below a living wage and that ensure that workers have no protection under labor unions and laws that regulate corporate interests and power. And as the Federal Reserve has noted, these jobs won't be returning even if there is a major upswing in the U.S. economy. Bush has bragged about creating new jobs for Americans, but he fails to inform the public that these are overwhelmingly part-time, adjunct, minimum-wage positions that provide no pension, union protection, or healthcare benefits. Part-time, temp, or subcontracted jobs currently make up 30 percent of the workforce and this number is rapidly increasing.

1.6 As the minimum wage is currently \$5.15 an hour, full-time workers in the United States make about \$10,712 a year—recall that the poverty level for an individual is \$9,214. This makes it impossible to afford adequate housing throughout the country. "In fact, in the median state a minimum-wage worker would have to work 87 hours each week to afford a two-bedroom apartment at 30 percent of his or her income, which is the federal definition of affordable housing" (National Coalition for the Homeless, 1999:

3). "A couple with two kids would have to work a combined 3.3 full-time minimum-wage jobs to make ends meet" (Ellison, 2001: 3). It's no wonder that one out of every five homeless people is employed. It is important to note that contrary to popular myth, the majority of minimum-wage workers are not teenagers: 71.4 percent are over the age of 20 (National Coalition for the Homeless, 1999). The average income in the United States is shrinking and workers are earning less, adjusting for inflation, than they did a quarter century ago. Meanwhile,

median CEO pay at the 100 largest companies in Fortune's survey rose 14 percent last year to \$13.2 million. Still, average CEO pay in Business Week's survey was \$7.4 million. It would take 241 years for an average worker paid \$30,722 to make that amount. (Sklar, 2003: 4)

The ratio of average CEO pay in the U.S. to the average blue-collar worker pay in the same corporation is 470 to 1. Although the average worker in this country now has to labor for more hours each year to make ends meet than in the last 3 decades, the current Bush administration wants to make revisions to the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act that would take the 40-hour workweek away, and it wants to limit over-time pay that more than 8 million people rely on to financially keep their heads above water.

1.7 At the same time Bush's Whitehouse, with the support of big business, is scrambling to "legalize" undocumented workers. In response to a shortage of low-wage, low-skill employees, the current administration, claiming it is concerned with the human rights of undocumented labor in this country, is looking into a Guest Worker Program. This wouldn't be the first time the government has done so. The Bracero Program, in 1942 "legally" allowed more than 4 million Mexican farm laborers into the U.S. to work the fields and orchards. These workers spoke little to no English, signed contracts that were controlled by independent farmers associations and the Farm Bureau, and were immediately put to work without an understanding of their rights. In 1964, when the Bracero Program was finally dismantled, the U.S. Department of Labor officer heading the operation, Lee G. Williams, described the operation as "legalized slavery." Thus, being pro-immigrant does not necessarily mean being pro social justice. Today the harsh reality is that beyond the concocted hype about the usurping of quality employment by "outsiders," the job opportunities that are intended for migrant workers, the majority of immigrants, and the nation's own down-trodden, consist of low-wage manual labor: cleaning crews, food service, the monotony of the assembly-line, and farm work.

1.8 In need of government protections and tax relief, workers in the United States don't get the red carpet treatment that corporations do. 60 percent of U.S. companies pay no income tax. By the year 2000, the corporate share of taxes had fallen to 17 percent (Soll, 2002). Corporations find creative ways to keep from paying the 35 percent tax on profits that they are legally compelled to cover. And yet the IRS "audits low-income Americans, specifically those who receive the Earned Income Tax Credit, much more frequently than it does wealthy Americans" (Soll, 2002: 8). Meanwhile the government has provided billions of dollars in tax cuts to the rich, and corporations are provided with \$125 billion a year in corporate subsidies, tax breaks, and other forms of welfare; and this doesn't include the \$400-plus billion that is funneled through the Pentagon's military industrial complex. Here the government socializes risk and investment while the public pays for the research and product development, but privatizes the profits. Its frantic deficit spending is a conscious effort to wipe out any money to sustain the public sector, making the privatization of healthcare, Medicare and Medicaid, social security, schools, etc. the only available option.

1.9 The working class not only pays for 'endless' wars with their tax dollars and by sustaining program cuts that fund these 'adventures in capitalism'—as the *Wall Street Journal* proudly advertises them— but with the lives of their children as well who make up the majority of combat soldiers. Bush, in his most recent State of the Union Address (1/20/04) shared with his captive audience a letter that he had received from a ten-year-old girl named Ashly, asking the president what she could do to help the nation. On top of

the typical hypocritical response of "work hard in school" and "help someone in need," he closed by saying, "And when you see a man or woman in uniform, say thank you." But Americans shouldn't be fooled by the vulgar patriotism that is supposed to go with being part of "an army of one"—the current Bush administration cut funds for veteran's health care, closed seven veteran hospitals, tried to cut Federal Impact Aid offered since 1950 to school districts that provide educational services to military children that live off-base, proposed doubling costs for prescription drugs for veterans, and the Pentagon had even planned to cut pay for troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Perhaps most disturbing is the fact that 40 percent of homeless men in America have served in the armed forces.

1.10 Pointing out the ubiquity of swindles and greed that make up the political economy of corporate life, Bernie Sanders (2002) notes:

One of the most egregious forms of corporate welfare can be found at a little known federal agency called the Export-Import Bank, an institution that has a budget of about \$1 billion a year and the capability of putting at risk some \$15.5 billion in loan guarantees annually. Over 80 percent of the subsidies distributed by the Export-Import Bank goes to Fortune 500 corporations. Among the companies that receive taxpayer support from the Export-Import Bank is Enron, Boeing, Halliburton, Mobil Oil, IBM, General Electric, AT&T, Motorola, Lucent Technologies, FedEx, General Motors, Raytheon, and United Technologies....The great irony of the Export-Import Bank policy is that in the name of 'job creation' a substantial amount of federal funding goes to corporations that are eliminating hundreds of thousands of American jobs. American workers are providing funding to companies that are shutting down the plants in which they work and are moving them to China, Mexico, Vietnam, and wherever they can find cheap labor. (11)

By cheap labor, we're often talking between 13.5 and 36 cents an hour; we're also talking about a total disregard for child-labor laws and environmental protections (National Labor Committee for Worker and Human Rights, 2003).

1.11 As one of the largest corporations on the planet with revenues in 2002 of \$31.7 billion, let's use General Electric as case example of the kind of corporate "virtue" that neoliberals want the world to embrace. Contradicting the basic principles of capitalism, GE has benefited from massive federal subsidies and \$2.5 billion in direct loans and loan guarantees from the Export-Import Bank (Sanders, 2002). This is a corporation that has been very vocal over the years about its efforts to globalize its workforce, holding true to its word by cutting hundreds of thousands of jobs in the U.S. over the past thirty years. Jack Welch, the former CEO of GE, and good friend of the Reagan administration, stated, "Ideally, you'd have every plant you own on a barge." This is a company that reduced the life of its light bulbs during the Depression in order to increase its profits, was busted for working with a German weapons manufacturer during the Second World War, and has been convicted of a number of fraudulent practices. Contributing to the Republican Party over the years, and involved in weapons production and sales and developing nuclear technologies, GE, a corporation that ironically wields the motto "We bring good things to life," has a long history of anti-unionism and is currently partaking in union busting in Mexico so that it doesn't have to pay the workers a living wage to produce its products. On the cultural front, this corporate giant is trying to merge with Vivendi Universal Entertainment and consequently take control of Universal Pictures and a number of cable channels and create NBC Universal—what would be the world's sixth largest media company. GE would have even more power over the types of stories about youth and labor that could be disseminated on a grand scale.

1.12 Within this antagonistic economic climate mass upheavals and uprisings are possible, but the elite classes work diligently to suppress political and cultural dissent and the dissemination of substantive information to the public. Within corporate-dominated media, the business press which addresses the

financial concerns of so few saturates the society and readily demonizes organized labor in the public eye. Meanwhile, what was at one time a vibrant labor press dealing with such substantive issues as union organizing, child care, health insurance, workplace safety, and providing a living wage, is virtually extinct in mainstream media. While workers in unions earn 30 percent more than non-union people doing the same job, and get far more guaranteed benefits such as a pension and healthcare, the republican assault on organized labor has been devastating. By 2002, only 13.2 percent of wage and salary workers were union members—a number that is getting smaller every year (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2003). Regardless of the federal law (Section 7 of the National Labor Relations Act) that states that

Employees shall have the right to self organization, to form, join or assist labor organizations, to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing and to engage in other concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection...

The harsh reality is that those who try to organize often face serious repercussions. Human Rights Watch has recorded that ten to twenty thousand people a year are fired or punished for trying to unionize. Low-wage earners in particular face an atmosphere of intimidation and as a result many, desperate for work, steer clear of union activity.

1.13 As far as political influence is concerned, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, "Some 80 percent of all political contributions now come from less than 1 percent of the population" (Collins, Hartman & Sklar, 1999: 5). It should thus come as no surprise that most of the public policy debate remains in the confines of the Wall Street and Fortune 500 agenda.

1.14 Where does all this corporate globe trotting leave children? Of the 6.3 billion people that currently live on the planet, almost half of them are under that age of 25. Half the world's 1 billion poor are children. 11 million of them under the age of 5 die annually because of malnutrition, dirty water, disease, and poor housing. Hundreds of millions of kids around the world are not getting a formal education and millions are trapped in sweat shops or caught up in military conflicts where they are often forced into fighting someone else's economic wars.

1.15 In the United States, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2002), "In 2001, 11.7 million children, or 16.3 percent, were poor" (2). 9.2 million children have no health insurance, and millions do not even have a decent home. An Urban Institute study revealed that about 3.5 million people are homeless in the U.S. [a number projected to increase 5 percent each year] and 1.3 million (or 39 percent) of them are children (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2002). The nation ranks 17<sup>th</sup> of all industrialized countries in efforts to eradicate poverty among children and 23<sup>rd</sup> in infant mortality. And this is the great "success" model that capitalists are boasting and selling globally, or more accurately, forcing down the throats of the world.

1.16 During the week of International Human Rights Day, the Kensington Welfare Rights Union went to Geneva, Switzerland to expose to the world the violations of economic human rights occurring in the U.S. The organization highlighted the Bush administration's economic policies that lead to increased poverty, homelessness, unemployment, lack of healthcare, and limited access to quality water, food, heat, and education. The group is also protesting government and media efforts to silence the economically oppressed.

1.17 The institutions that shape mass culture in the United States, such as schools and the media, do in fact avoid inspiring talk about class and misery in the domain of public discourse. While there is a recognition and romanticization of a grand middle class, particularly during election time, this category generally works to obfuscate the realities of class conflict. Meanwhile, the poor and the rich are depicted as living on the polar edges of the society's economic spectrum. According to the mythology, they are not

dialectically intertwined and thus exist apart from each other. In fact, the super rich are made virtually invisible in this country—other than showing off their lavish lifestyles on entertainment television. As Michael Parenti (2000) points out, 1 percent of the population goes undocumented in income distribution reports because U.S. Census Bureau surveys are not distributed to the wealthiest of Americans such as Michael Eisner who in 1996 as the CEO of Disney made \$565 million or Larry Ellison the CEO of Oracle who made \$706 million in 2001. The Census computer, which bypasses the long-term unemployed and the homeless, is said to not be able to process income above \$1 million. As such, if you make over \$100,000 your class status is nationally in the top 4 percent—an absurd misrepresentation to say the least. It is equally ridiculous to claim that supercomputers are brilliant enough to get us to Mars on Bush's newest corporate endeavor and deficit binge, but not intelligent enough to count and process above one million.

1.18 Unequal property relations, the exploitation of labor, and the concomitant class conflicts that reveal different economic, political, and cultural interests need to be explored if much of the lived experience of youth is to be understood. In particular, this special issue focuses on how national security, educational institutions and policies, and media ownership work to confine, shape, and demobilize youth.

### **What To Do With All Those Throw Away Kids?**

Henry Giroux, in his contribution to this special issue—"Disappearing Youth in the Age of George W. Bush," reveals how conservatives are "dismantling the parts of the public sector that serve the social and democratic needs of the non-affluent majority of the American populace." He examines how the State is developing and implementing repressive and punitive social policies to contain "disposable" youth as massive budget cuts for war and other corporate exploits gut domestic funding for education, health care, and other public needs and services. Giroux reveals how the class and racial war being waged against young people is playing out in public schools that are increasingly being militarized with the addition of armed guards, security systems, and raids of the likes of Stratford High School's when students this year were held at gunpoint for a random drug check by police in the poor community of Goose Creek, South Carolina. Giroux also challenges zero-tolerance policies and practices and the criminalization of working-class, poor, homeless, and racially subordinated youth as they feed into the expansion of the prison-industrial complex as a way to contain disposable populations.

2.2 Prisons have been strategically used within the feudalism of today's capitalist social relations to lock up what are seen as superfluous populations that the powers that be have no immediate use for (Bortner & Williams, 1997; Cole, 2000; Davis, 2000; Dyer, 2001; James 2002; Mauer & The Sentencing Project, 2001; Parenti, 2000; Rosenblatt, 1996). As Loic Wacquant (2002) states, "The astounding upsurge in black incarceration in the past three decades results from the obsolescence of the ghetto as a device for caste control and the correlative need for a substitute apparatus for keeping (unskilled) African Americans in a subordinate and confined position—physically, socially, and symbolically" (23).

2.3 As a member of a community leadership and social justice team in Boston, I was recently allowed to "tour" the Suffolk County House of Corrections. What was immediately apparent about this depressing scene, though I had fully anticipated it, was that the overwhelming majority of inmates were racially subordinated—mostly African Americans and Latinos. Those that were White were marked as working poor by their teeth, tattoos, and speech, and especially their stories. What was equally upsetting about the Suffolk scene was that almost everyone in this stark environment was young. At 38, I felt like an old man in a sea of youth(s). But the concept of youth didn't connote a free-spirited, open-ended quest for future aspirations. On the contrary, the room was threadbare with despair, gloom, anger, silence, and pain. As one African-American young man stated to me after I moved away from the prison guards and into the crowd:

This isn't rehabilitation...just look around. These are young people locked up all day and night long, for what, for smoking a joint, or getting in a fist fight in the street! There's no education here, there's no preparation for a future, there's no room here for healing—there's just time, a waste of time. This place breeds anger and hostility. Just look around, this is an entire generation that's being thrown away like the day's garbage, only this "garbage" is profitable!

2.4 In addition to containment, where there's profit—in what's increasingly turning into one of the nation's largest growing privatized business endeavors—there's demand. The prison population in the United States has consequently skyrocketed over 200 percent since 1980.<sup>1</sup> There are now over two million people in jail in the U.S., and although we have only 5 percent of the world's population, we have 25 percent of its prisoners.<sup>2</sup> The U.S. surpassed Russia in the year 2000 and now has the world's highest incarceration rate. It is 5 to 17 times higher than all other Western nations. By the close of the millennium, 6.3 million people were on probation, in jail or prison, or on parole in this country.

2.5 Over 70 percent of prisoners in the U.S. are from non-European racial and ethnic backgrounds. African-American males make up the largest number of those entering prisons each year in the United States. Racially subordinated women are also being incarcerated in epidemic proportions. One can only imagine the psychological and academic effects on children when their parents are locked up. And yet, this insatiable appetite for incarceration comes from the same bunch that preaches "family values" and the need for parents to play a bigger role in children's lives.

2.6 While the validity of these incarceration statistics is not in question in national discussions, there is great contestation as to why they exist. Conservatives endlessly wield racist and class-specific representations of violent groups that need to be contained. When young people are represented (as opposed to self-described) in the media, especially the poor and racially subordinated, they are overwhelmingly depicted as dangerous and untrustworthy. There is no accompanying discussion of unemployment, poverty, the alienating and commodified junk culture, or the destructive logic of the market that deeply affects their lives.

2.7 While racism can't be completely conflated with the economic base of capitalism, we certainly need to look at the ways in which it is used to exploit diverse groups within capitalist social relations. As a socio-political construction, racism, like class, is structurally part of the U.S. economy, politics, and culture and serves an important role in keeping at bay working-class unity and maintaining a system of labor exploitation. As E. San Juan, Jr. (2003) argues, "Race and class are dialectically cojoined in the reproduction of capitalist relations of exploitation and domination" (9). While the construct of youth and the realities of racism and class conflict always need to be understood within particular historical and geopolitical specificities, given the current historical juncture, much of race relations and race conflict are structured by the demands of neoliberalism as it plays out both locally and globally.

2.8 Molly Secours, in her contribution to this special issue—"Minority and Disenfranchised Youth in Juvenile Justice: A Dominant Majority Problem—Reframing and Renaming the Issues," expands on Giroux's analysis of the militarization of society and the role of the prison-industrial complex by focusing on how White supremacy functions dialectically with the logic of capital to keep racially subordinated youth locked down in prisons. Secours' narratives put human faces on the misery of the prison-industrial complex and she insists that the "dominant majority" be forced to confront the fact that asymmetrical relations of power produce economic, political, and cultural margins, misery, deviance, and resistance.

### **Class Warfare in Public Schools**

Regardless of all the national hype about youth and violence, and a growing body of research in the social sciences documenting the neglect of so many young people in the United States, it is dumbfounding how

few links are made in mainstream debates in this country, between government and socially-sanctioned policies and practices that have historically harmed children and their families, and the increasing violence involving kids (Leistyna, Woodrum & Sherblom, 1996). As Noam Chomsky (1999) points out, the obvious effects of such historical conditions are "you get violence against children and violence by children" (110). Abusive policies that embody class warfare are particularly prevalent in public schools as these institutions act as powerful agencies that not only help turn kids into fodder for prisons by forcing them out and onto the streets, but they also function to reproduce the "normalcy" of capitalist social relations, and generate a semi-skilled workforce.

3.2 Since President George W. Bush signed into law the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001, better known as *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*, high-stakes testing has been officially embraced and positioned to be the panacea of academic underachievement in public schools in the United States. The Act engenders a hitherto unheard-of transfer of power to federal and state governments, granting them the rights to largely determine the goals and outcomes of these educational institutions. As a direct result of this new conservative agenda, school administrators, teachers, communities, and parents are stripped of any substantive decision-making power in the nation's public schools. The negotiating powers of teacher unions are also in the cross hairs of this assault on public education.

3.3 Embracing what is in fact an old neoliberal approach dressed up as innovative reform, proponents of this market-driven educational model make use of words and phrases like equity, efficiency, and the enhancement of global competitiveness, to continue to sell to the public their agenda. However, this same political machinery—this synergy between government and the corporate sector—shrouds, in the name of "choice," conservative efforts to privatize public schools by forcing their failure and collapse and subsequently channeling public funds to private firms that love the idea that mandatory education means mandatory consumers.

3.4 In this "no corporation left behind" agenda, where 6 million children have thus far been left in the wake, devoted advocates of current education legislation effectively disguise the motivations of a profit-driven testing industry led by publishing power houses like McGraw-Hill, which is the largest producer of standardized tests in the country. In the end, corporate elites of the likes of Harold McGraw III, CEO of McGraw-Hill, who was appointed by President Bush to the Transition Advisory Committee on Trade, will be the only ones to gain from this national obsession with standardized assessment (Metcalf, 2002). *No Child Left Behind* leaves little to no room for success in public schools, but plenty of room for profits—\$7 billion in materials alone. Corporations like McGraw-Hill gain financially by selling their materials on a grand scale, and by the ways that schools with such limited and limiting curricula, pedagogy, and skills development will now guarantee the production of a low and semi-skilled labor force that is in high demand in our now post-industrial service-oriented economy.

3.5 Under pressure to produce results on these standardized tests, or face the consequences of cuts in federal resources and funding, school closure, and in some cases law suits, many school administrators have been forced to drastically narrow their curriculum and cut back on anything and everything that is perceived as not contributing to raising test scores. Within this one-size-fits-all standards approach to schooling, the multifarious voices and needs of culturally diverse, low-income, racially subordinated, and linguistic-minority students are simply ignored or discarded.

3.6 Many Republicans, and Democrats alike, also embrace the national movement towards draconian English-Only language and literacy policies and practices. With no defensible theory or body of research to support his claim, Ron Unz, the multimillionaire spearhead of this movement, nonetheless maintains that linguistic-minority students require only one year of Structured Immersion in an English-only context in order to join native speakers in mainstream classes. However, as James Crawford (2003) notes:



In 2002-2003, it [Unz's Structured English Immersion] failed at least 1,479,420 children who remained limited in English. Only 42 percent of California students whose English was limited in 1998, when Proposition 227 passed, have since been redesignated as fluent in English—five years later! (1)

With five years of watered down content, rather than intensive subject instruction in the primary language, these linguistic-minority students—75 percent of whom reside in low-income, urban areas that have schools that are highly segregated and literally falling apart—will certainly be ill-prepared for high-stakes tests. In states like Massachusetts, students who do not pass the state's standardized test in high school will not graduate. Instead they will be shown to the door and handed a Certificate of Attendance on their way out; unless of course like so many others they "drop out" beforehand. Under-funded and purposely misguided, these federal and state programs are designed to fail to secure any future for so many youth.

3.7 As advocates of the corporate model of schooling hide behind positivist notions of science, objectivity, neutrality and "universal" knowledge to justify class structure and stratification, what is largely missing from national debates and federal and state policies regarding public education is a recognition and analysis of the social and historical conditions within which teachers teach and learners learn; that is, how class warfare, racism, and other oppressive and malignant ideologies that inform actual educational practices and institutional conditions play a much more significant role in students' academic achievement than whether or not they have access to abstract content and constant evaluation. For those throw-away masses, a callous social infrastructure, constant exposure to harsh material and symbolic conditions both inside and outside of school, incessant harassment, segregated school activities, limited, exclusionary, and distorted curricula, ill-prepared teachers, and apathetic and abusive educator attitudes and pedagogies work to virtually ensure the self-fulfilling prophesy of youth failure, deviance, and resistance (Kozol, 1996; Leistyna, 2002). As two former students that had been kicked out of an urban public school told me:

**Stevie:** I hate that school. Somebody oughta blow it up! They're a bunch of jerks man, I swear to god! You know what I notice Pepi, I noticed when I used to go to school, if the teachers knew you came from a nice like middle-class neighborhood, they'd treat you good. They give you special attention. But if they knew you came from the projects or something....

**Carlos:** If you come from a bad neighborhood they make sure you never make it.

3.8 What's key to cultural reproduction is ensuring that the oppressive ideologies that inform dominant discourse in this country go unquestioned. This is the primary role of conservative educators like Diane Ravitch, Lynne Cheney, and William Bennett—omnipresent spokespersons for the Republican Party—who argue against any effort to deconstruct the underlying values, interests, and power relationships that structure educational policies and practices, insisting that such analysis has corrupted the academic environment. Likewise, the well-funded think tanks that produce much of the research and literature to support conservative educational causes also have an obvious, ideologically-specific take on these issues, one that is widely supported by mainstream corporate media whose ownership have similar interests (Haas, Molnar & Serrano, 2002; McChesney & Nichols, 2002). The goal of depoliticizing the public's understanding of social institutions, especially schools, in the name of neutrality simply functions to maintain the status quo.

3.9 Corporate guided education is certainly not concerned with infusing civic responsibility in preparation for public life; rather, it is about ensuring the dissemination of a particular market logic within which labor stratification is embraced and confirmed (Anyon, 1980; Apple, 2001; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 2001; Saltman, 2000). Given this reality, Stanley Aronowitz, in his contribution to this special issue—"Against Schooling: Education and Social Class," argues that we shouldn't conflate

"schooling" with "education." "Schooling" functions to offer credentials, and "contrary to their democratic pretensions, they [schools] teach conformity to the social, cultural, and occupational hierarchy." Aronowitz holds that educational institutions are not designed to engage students in studying labor history or reading the world critically, creatively, and independently; nor are they, he insists, intended to nurture politically active citizens. Rather than provide this type of "education," schools, he argues, function to leave working-class students at the bottom of the academic hierarchy and consequently with limited occupational choices, if any.

3.10 Ellen Brantlinger, in her contributing chapter—"An Application of Gramsci's 'Who Benefits?' to High-Stakes Testing," extends this critique of public education and high-stakes testing by analyzing who benefits from this evaluative format. Brantlinger implicates test producers, trans-global capitalists, media moguls, conservative politicians and political pundits, religious conservatives, enterprising school superintendents, advocates of school privatization, and the educated middle class in the failing of so many working-class, linguistic-minority, and racially subordinated students.

3.11 Dennis Carlson's "Leaving Children Behind: Urban Education, Class Politics, and the Machines of Transnational Capitalism," offers alternatives to this one-size-fits-all approach to schooling and evaluation. He argues in favor of educational transformation and action research but warns that the current hegemonic discourse in urban school renewal focuses too much attention on individual schools' success or failure with students thus shifting attention away from the larger discourses, structures, and technologies of domination, inequity, and oppression that are implicated in the social production of failure among urban youth.

3.12 These critical educators argue that students should not only be included in the developmental process of curricula in schools, but they should also be mobilized into organized political bodies (critical communities of struggle) able to voice their concerns and realize their own goals. Educators and other public cultural workers desperately need to forge creative partnerships with youth in order to analyze and confront the oppressive conditions and social formations that have inevitably manufactured and imposed a history of despair. Not only do students readily express an interest in their own lives and what they are deeply connected to, but they also generate a great interest in education and the state of society if allowed to connect in substantive and politically influential ways to the very world around them (Cooper, 2000; Featherstone, 1999; Jenkins, 1998; Lipsitz, 1994; Martinez, 2000; Ross & Rose, 1994).

3.13 What is key to developing presence of mind among diverse youth is the recognition that political consciousness and action do not take place in a vacuum. Class not only consists of a structural reality built on political and economic processes and relationships, it also relies on symbolic systems to shape the kinds of meaning, identity, desire, and subjectivity that can work to ensure the maintenance of what Antonio Gramsci (1971) referred to as the hegemony of "common sense." Thus, in order to effectively create self-empowering conditions for youth to come to voice, young people need to be encouraged to problematize the sources and sensibilities of their own subjectivities. In Paulo Freire's (1985) words: "As active participants and real subjects, we can make history only when we are continually critical of our very lives" (199). It is thus imperative, as Aronowitz points out, for educators to tap into the other pedagogical sites, beyond schools, that shape youth consciousness, dreams, and desires.

### **Globalization, Representational Politics and the Shaping of Class Consciousness**

Understanding youth subjectivities without essentializing them (as there is an enormous amount of intragroup diversity that constitutes this analytic distinction) entails examining the effects of material conditions, relations of production and distribution, and political regulation on people's lives, as well as the influences of cultural/representational politics—which are primarily occupied with how meaning is produced, circulated, legitimated, and consumed in society. In considering how meaning, consumption,

and leisure are not mutually exclusive to production, labor, and institutions, a central challenge for critical cultural workers is to apprentice youth into examining the current state of systems of production and distribution and theorizing how they may complement or conflict (or both) with political and cultural logics. The approach encouraged here is to identify the leading reactionary or transformative forces and their relationships with other social factors.

4.2 This in part entails understanding culture as a pedagogical force in which the multiplicity of aural and visual signifying systems that people are inundated with everyday, through language, TV, advertising, radio, print journalism, music, film, and so on, are ideological and formative, rather than merely vehicles for expression or reflections of reality. They are the conduits through which dominant values and beliefs that work to shape how people see, interpret, and act as socialized and political beings, can be promoted. These pedagogical forces have worked to shape public consciousness about youth and the working class and poor and they have worked to shape and justify socially-sanctioned practices and policies that go against the best interests of labor and those in need. For example, in 1998 there were 24,000 documented acts of corporate lawbreaking, yet the media barely gave it a notice. As such, it shouldn't be surprising that so many people were suddenly shocked by the recently "discovered" corporate abuses and atrocities of corporate giants of the likes of Enron, Tyco, and Worldcom. Because profit-driven journalism only allows for spectacle and infotainment, as it is controlled by a corporate elite who wish to protect their own interests and not offend their advertisers, there was no early investigation into such malfeasance.

4.3 While the myth of a liberal media bias persists, Hollywood and the corporate media giants—Viacom, News Corporation, AOL Time Warner, General Electric, and Walt Disney have rarely produced positive representations of labor (Aronowitz, 1992; Booker, 1999; Butsch, 1995; Ehrenreich, 1995; Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Mantsios, 2001; Martin, 2004; McChesney, 1992; Ross, 1998). When poverty manages to make its way into the media it is usually played out in a rags to riches narrative that feeds into the myths of meritocracy, the American dream, and the "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" ethos. In the end, these types of representation work to justify class relations by blaming the victim, within these late stages of capitalism, for having a poor work ethic, being financially irresponsible, having bad family values, having little interest in education and advancement, and/or (in some genetic twist) not having the necessary smarts.

4.4 This special issue includes an analysis of the pedagogical terrain of representation and encourages theorizing about how culture shapes our sense of political agency and mediates the relations between everyday class struggles and structures of power. In order to interrogate dominant discourses, confront the oppressive values and beliefs that have come to inform mainstream social and political practices, and continuously forge and work to secure economic and political rights within the endless antagonisms that feed the ongoing democratic process, readers of this special issue are encouraged to not only think about culture politically, but also to think about politics culturally. As the next two chapters reveal, culture and politics coexist in a symbiotic relationship in which effective political mobilization can create new cultural spaces, and such transformative political movements emerge out of progressive cultural shifts.

4.5 In "No Carnival Here: Oppressed Youth and Class Relations in *City of God*," Valerie Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, Nathalia Jaramillo, Juha Suoranta, and Peter McLaren first expose the malice and deceit of neoliberal policies and practices, and argue in favor of the abolition of capital. They subsequently articulate a position which links critical cultural studies to a Marxist humanist tradition of revolutionary critical pedagogy capable of effectively challenging and dismantling the unrestrained military-industrial-media complex. Through the Brazilian film *City of God* the authors argue that critical, dialectical analyses of popular culture "can undress the deeper political, social, and economic relations and consequences impacting youth, which may not be obvious at the surface level of cultural products." Within their dialectical analysis of youth culture rooted in historical materialism, the authors situate the lives of youth in Brazilian *favelas* within a local-global nexus in order to reveal the contradiction between capital and

labor. At the same time, they provide sign posts into the possibilities and dangers of youth popular culture.

4.6 Also concerned with representational politics and rupturing the myth that children's films are merely entertaining and beyond politics, Robin Truth Goodman, in her chapter "Harry Potter's Magic and the Market: What are Youth Learning about Gender, Race, and Class," illustrates how the pedagogical forces of youth film work to reinforce existing economic, race, and gender relations which function to oppress.

## Conclusion

In order to combat this aforementioned long lists of abuses of power, it is crucial to formulate more inclusive and effective political subjects and democratizing networks that are able to analyze political moments and consequently develop critical responses to oppression that have both local and global dimensions. In order to accomplish this, Julie Webber, in her contributing and closing chapter of this special issue, "Global Youth: The Great Divide," argues that the categories used to describe youth in the global marketplace be rethought "since the conceptual containers by which we have previously understood their subjectivity, role in the economy and polity, and relationship to the generations that mediate access to power and wealth in the world economy have shifted almost imperceptibly." Webber takes up the growing divisions in world politics created by neoliberal imperialist policies and practices as they apply to youth in both the "first" and "third" worlds and asks the fundamental question: If the nation-state is coming to an end, what can youth anticipate finding in their future under globalization?

5.2 Rather than forcing young people to accept commodified culture as the only legitimate path to happiness and success, youth should explore and envision different ways of organizing social relations that can work to restore the centrality of politics over the tyranny of market forces. In search of "confrontation," as Webber puts it, youth need to be encouraged to engage in class analysis. This praxis of theorizing the world and acting upon it is crucial if Young people wish to take control of their lives as suggested in the opening quote of this introduction. But not the kind of control that the sheriff is alluding to—that is, to simply get on the line when ordered to do so. Rather, the idea is to develop political consciousness so that youth can differentiate between nation and corporation and global peace and social justice and the imperatives of profits, and subsequently, though consciousness comes with no guarantees, forge critical and diverse coalitions that can fight against all forms of exploitation and oppression. From here, youth can work to take control of existing disciplinary actions and security forces, and democratize educational institutions, global technologies, environmental resources, and media, information, and financial systems. This kind of solidarity, as opposed to isolated localized efforts, may present the only way of combating transnational corporations that no longer need to negotiate with local labor organizations for living wages and realistic environmental protections or with area-specific human rights groups—they just go elsewhere, leaving trade restrictions, unemployment, poverty and political chaos in their path.

5.3 As guest editor of this special issue it is my hope that the following chapters will help reveal class conflicts by exploring youth as a category through which class is lived, and consequently inspire more liberatory social practices. Unlike a world that can strive to provide social justice for and harmony among racial, ethnic, religious, sexual, and gender differences, I can not imagine "class differences without exploitation and domination" (Meiksins Wood, 1995: 258). The youth of the world can certainly be looked to as a democratizing force capable of dismantling the structured inequalities of class-based societies. It is for this very reason that conservatives and capitalists fear them so and vigilantly work to contain and control them. In response, critical educators and cultural workers need to rigorously labor to help youth physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually break free. The key for young people to take control of their lives is their solidarity with others in an effort to understand and dismantle those economic, political, and cultural structures that work to lock them in silence.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> It's important to note that as of 1998, 1.2 million prisoners were convicted of nonviolent crimes. In addition, with the spreading of the three strikes law, people are going to jail for life for stealing golf clubs, food, etc. Mandatory minimums are also feeding this rapidly expanding industry. It is also crucial to acknowledge that in this rush to lock people up, about one-quarter of those people in prison in the U.S. are confined in local jails and state and federal prisons on drug charges. In federal prisons, drug offenders now comprise 59 percent of all inmates. In nine states, over 10 percent of the inmates were indicted on marijuana offenses, and over 50 percent of those convicted were on charges of possession. Very few of these prisoners are high-level drug traffickers. In 2000, according to the Office of National Drug Control Policy, "about two-thirds of the federal drug budget is allocated to interdiction, law enforcement and supply reduction efforts. One-third is allocated to prevention, treatment and demand reduction" (for all of the above statistics, see <<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/usa/Rcedrg00-03.htm>> 10 November 2003).

<sup>2</sup> See <<http://www.angelfire.com/rnb/y/majority.htm>> 12 December 2003.

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